

Catch & Release

Releasing the fish you catch is a good way to help maintain fish populations. But catch-and-release fishing requires a different, gentler approach than “catch and cook.” You can greatly increase a released fish’s chance of survival by following a few simple guidelines.

Hook, line, and tackle

If you plan to release your catch, don’t “play” the fish, as this will stress it and reduce its chances of recovery. Bring the fish in quickly.

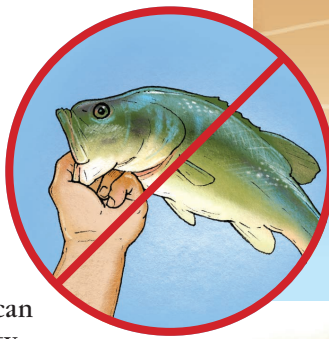
Barbless circle hooks are best for catch and release as they are designed to hook the fish’s lip and are easily removed. If you’re using barbed hooks, flatten the barb with pliers to make removal easier. Do not use treble hooks or lures with multiple hooks, as these are difficult to remove, especially if swallowed.

If a hook is swallowed, keep the fish unless you can easily remove the hook without injury and with minimal handling.

Don’t use ultralight tackle, as the lighter line and decreased reel drag will lengthen the fight and stress the fish. Lighter line will also break more easily, leaving the fish with an embedded hook.

Handling

The less you handle the fish, the better. Keep the fish in the water while you remove the hook. Do not hold the fish up for a photo shoot. This is especially important for long-bodied fish such as pike, as their internal organs can slide out of place due to gravity.

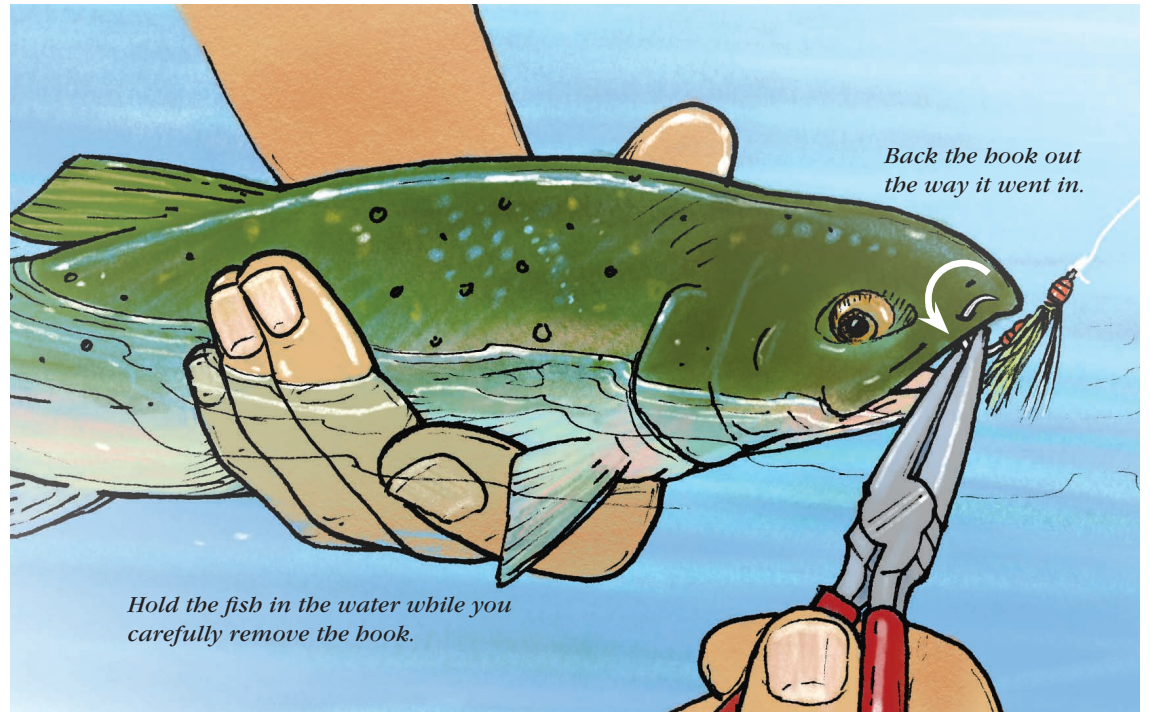


If you must remove the fish from the water, handle it with wet hands. Dry hands can remove the fish’s protective slime layer. Hold the fish by the lip or support it in the water with your free hand under its belly. Do not hold the fish by the gills. Do not throw the fish back in the water, as the impact can harm the fish.

If you must net the fish, use a release net made with soft, knotless netting.

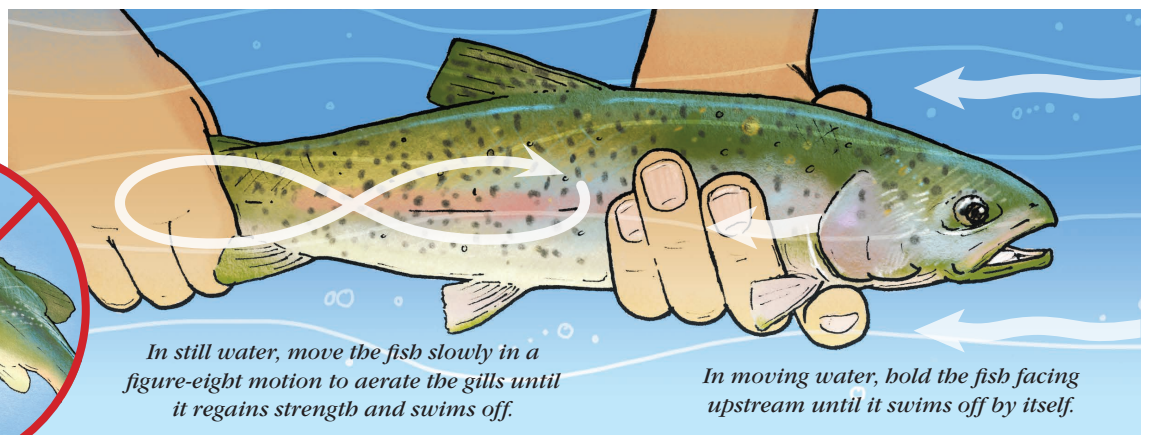
Fish responsibly

Use the right gear to ensure the fish is released quickly and with as little harm as possible. If you plan to keep some of your catch, choose a smaller fish that swallowed the hook rather than a lip-hooked fish that’s trophy size.



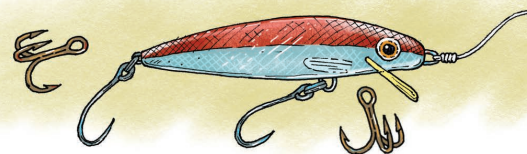
Back the hook out the way it went in.

Hold the fish in the water while you carefully remove the hook.

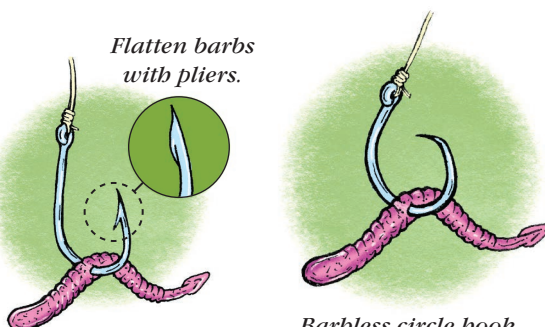


In still water, move the fish slowly in a figure-eight motion to aerate the gills until it regains strength and swims off.

In moving water, hold the fish facing upstream until it swims off by itself.

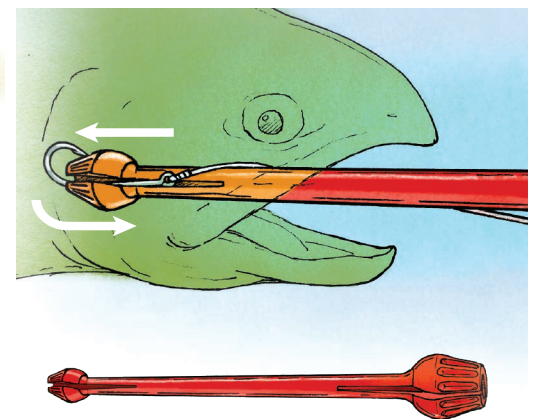


Replace treble hooks with single, barbless hooks



Flatten barbs with pliers.

Barbless circle hook



A hook disgorger can make swallowed hook removal easy and relatively harmless. If the hook cannot be accessed easily, cut the line as close to the hook as possible. Barbless hooks will dislodge naturally.

Sources: anglingunlimited.com, *New York Fishing Regulations Guide*

Illustrations, text and layout by Jerry Russell